

me, I will certainly discontinue so he may continue making progress on the bill.

I want to speak about the agriculture crisis briefly, and I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes as if in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AGRICULTURE CRISIS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, we have a number of things to complete and to discuss and debate in the coming 5 or 6 weeks before this Congress finishes its work. Many of them are very important. The work of the Appropriations Committee in getting the appropriations bills done on a timely basis is critically important. All of us understand that. I am here today to talk about one specific issue that must be addressed. It is an issue that must be addressed on an urgent basis by this Congress before it completes its work in the 105th Congress. The issue is the farm crisis that exists in rural America.

I come from a rural State, the State of North Dakota, which is the size of 10 Massachusetts in landmass. It has 640,000 residents, and 40 to 50 percent of our State's economy comes from agriculture, and our system of family farming. I have spoken on the floor at some length about the problems and challenges we face these days.

In the last year, family farmers in our State suffered a 98-percent drop in net farm income. Yes, I said a 98-percent loss of their net income. Now, these are families who have elected, for a variety of reasons, to populate rural America. They own a farm. They raise livestock. They till the soil and produce grain. They produce America's foodstuffs. They take enormous risks, often with very few rewards. They live out in the country and they turn that yard light on at night, and that illuminates a family out there somewhere living on the land trying to make a living.

What is happening these days in the Farm Belt is that grain prices have collapsed, and livestock prices are way down. These family farmers who have risked everything they have and invested it in their hopes and dreams in making this family farm work, are now all too often standing with tears in their eyes as their farm is being sold at an auction sale.

This country will lose something important if it loses its family farmers. I suppose we could farm America from California to Maine with giant agrifactories. We could have big corporate farms and a farming system where nobody lives on the land and there are no yard lights because nobody is there at night. Do we want corporate agrifactories farming America? This country will have lost something very important in its culture and in its economy if we lose our family farmers. And, we will lose them if we don't decide as a Congress to take action soon.

Congress needs to tell farmers that this nation wants to help them through this troubled time. We need to build a bridge across these price valleys, when grain prices, cattle prices and hog prices collapse. We want to help. But, if we don't do that soon, we won't have many farmers left.

This isn't about Democrats and Republicans, or conservatives and liberals; it is about values and whether we in this Congress believe that family farming contributes to this country. I consider myself a Jeffersonian kind of Democrat. A Jeffersonian Democrat is somebody who really believes in broad-based economic ownership in this country, and who believes that the political freedoms we enjoy in this country could not exist without economic freedom. Such freedom comes only with broad-based economic ownership. It does not come with concentration, nor with big corporations, but with broad-based ownership in which the men and women of America are out there investing in farms and small businesses. Nowhere is that broad-based economic ownership more important and more apparent to the economic health of this country than on America's farms and ranches.

I was in a Quonset building a couple of days ago in North Dakota. It was in the evening and there was a picnic out on the farmstead. Farmers from all around the county came. About 100 folks gathered there. This young fellow who owned this farm hadn't finished taking off his grain. He had been trying hard, but he hadn't gotten it all off the field yet. As we were in this Quonset hut at this picnic, the clouds began to form out in the west. First they were blue and then almost black. Those clouds came in as part of a vicious, vicious storm. It came with a vengeance with wind, hail, rain. Inside that Quonset, it sounded almost like war as the huge hailstones were hitting that steel roof, making a loud, echoing sound together with the pelting rain.

I watched those farmers in that Quonset building look at those clouds. I started to understand what that storm meant when tears welled up in their eyes and they were shaking their heads. Some of these farmers knew that storm was probably wiping them out, destroying their crop, and probably destroying their hope to get something off of those fields and get it to the market and pay some bills.

Those are the risks our farmers face. Two years ago, the Congress passed the farm bill. I didn't vote for it. I didn't think it was a good farm bill. In the last 2 years, wheat prices have dropped 57 percent, right off the table. This is critical to us because wheat is the largest cash crop in North Dakota that the family farmers raise. In addition to wheat prices collapsing on us, we have also had the worst crop disease in the century. The most damaging is known as fusarium head blight or scab. So we have had crop diseases, together with the wet cycle that has fostered these

diseases, a collapse in prices, and we have had auction sales all across the State. Family farmers are wondering whether they can continue. Their lenders are saying, "I don't think you can continue because the farm bill Congress passed has decreasing support prices in the out years, and it doesn't look good. Maybe you ought to get out now and save whatever little equity you can." That is the position farmers now find themselves in too often in rural America.

So the question for us is what should we do about it? In July this Senate passed a bill that included \$500 million in what is called an indemnification program. Senator CONRAD and I authored that, along with Senator CRAIG and others. That bill is now going into conference committee with the House. We need to get that bill through to try to get some short-term help to family farmers. The indemnification program will have to be increased because of other disaster situations. The Texas cotton crop was devastated. Louisiana, Oklahoma, and other States now face an increasing crisis in family farming and in agriculture.

In addition to that bill, it seems to me the Congress has a responsibility now to reach out to family farmers and say: "We made a mistake a couple years ago. We need to build back some sort of price support program for you. We don't want to tell you when to plant, or how to plant, or what to plant. We don't want to do that. But we want to say that you matter and we care about family farmers, and we want to provide some basic kind of price bridge to get you over these price valleys."

We only have a couple of weeks to do that. I find it disturbing that in our economic system that almost everyone who touches something that a farmer grows or produces is making money with it. Farmers buy the seed and they buy the equipment to plant the seed. They put the fertilizer in the ground. They hope it doesn't hail, and that the insects don't come. They hope it doesn't rain too much. And, they hope it rains enough. Then maybe they get a crop. When they harvest the crop, they hope when they put it in the truck and drive it to the elevator, they will get a decent price for it. Any problem along the way may mean they are gone, broke, and out of business.

Let's assume that farmer gets through the year and harvests the grain and gets a dismal price for it. That is what is happening right now. What happens to this harvest? Somebody puts it on a train and they put it on those tracks and down the tracks it goes. And guess what? The railroads are making money. Do you think they aren't making money off that wheat? The farmer who planted and harvested it didn't, but the railroads are making money, I suspect record profits. Then it goes to a miller. The millers are doing fine. They are making money. Then it goes to some plant someplace where

they are going to make breakfast food out of it. They take that kernel of wheat and put it into a plant and they puff it up. They make puffed wheat. They put it in a box and send it to a store and somebody buys the puffed wheat. They are making money off it. The people who move it, the people who puff it and crisp it, and the people who sell it in a store make money. Everyone makes money except the people who produced it. The family farmers don't make money from their harvests. They are going broke. What kind of a system is that?

Speaking of disconnections in the system, let's look further at our food system. We have a system that doesn't make sense. As farmers go broke we have circumstances where halfway around the world today, we hear that old women are climbing trees in Sudan trying to find leaves to eat because they are on the abyss of starvation. Millions are starving.

At the very same time an old woman is climbing a tree to get leaves to eat in Sudan, a farmer is loading a 2-ton truck to take to the country elevator, and when they get there, the elevator operator says, "We're sorry, this wheat isn't worth anything; the market has collapsed. This wheat doesn't have value." What kind of a disconnection is that? In the same world, halfway around the globe, people are starving and those who produce the best food-stuffs in the world are told it doesn't have value. There is something wrong with that picture as well.

My hope is that in the coming 4 or 5 weeks, Republicans and Democrats will understand that it is our responsibility as a country to say to that this most important sector, the agriculture sector, matters. We need to especially tell our family farmers that they matter and that we are going to make a difference by passing a price support mechanism of some type that gives them a chance to survive.

Let me add one final piece to this.

In addition to saying that price supports will be available when prices collapse and we want family farmers to survive, this Congress also ought to do something to help family farmers survive by saying we will correct the problems in the trade agreements that we have negotiated over recent years that have been to the detriment of family farmers.

Almost no one wants to hear my recitation of the trade problems because they have heard it so often.

We send negotiators to go to negotiate with Canada, and we have an \$11 billion trade deficit with Canada. They finish the negotiations, bring the treaty back to Congress, Congress passes the treaty, and the trade deficit doubles. They send negotiators to go negotiate with Mexico. That is done. They send it to Congress, and Congress approves it—not with my vote—and a surplus turns into a big deficit. They send negotiators to go out and negotiate a GATT agreement. The same thing: Record trade deficits.

Mr. President, there is something wrong.

Mr. President, there is something dreadfully wrong when our family farmers and other producers in this country—but especially family farmers—are told: "You compete in the open market. It is a global economy. You go compete." And our negotiators somehow fail to suit up. I don't think it should be necessary for our negotiators to wear a jersey reminding them for whom they are negotiating. But, somehow they should be reminded. Maybe we ought to have our negotiators wear a jersey like they wear in the Olympics that says "USA" just so they understand whom they represent. Maybe the next time they bring a trade treaty back to the U.S. Senate they can bring one back that serves our economic interest. We need trade agreements that are not driven by foreign policy, but instead are guided by hard-nosed economic policy that represents our economic interests.

Now we are told that in the next week or so we are going to have fast-track trade authority brought to the floor of the Senate. Good luck. This fast track is going to do more of the same trade stuff that got us into this trouble. Not with my vote. I intend to stand here and object to every single thing that is asked and every single thing that is requested to get fast track to the floor of the Senate. I am only one person. I probably can't stop it. But I can sure slow it down some. I fully intend to do that.

I have something to say to those folks who are so all-fired anxious to bring fast-track trade authority back to the floor of the Senate based on the package already reported out of the Senate Finance Committee. If you are so anxious to talk about trade, why don't you figure out how to deal with the problems created in our previous trade agreements. Before you start trying to figure out how you send people over to do new trade treaties with other countries, fix a few of the problems. Fix the problems with Canada. Tell our farmers why a flood of Canadian grain can come across in this direction, and a pickup truck with a few kernels gets stopped at the Canadian border, and they have to sweep the few kernels off because you can't take a few kernels of wheat into Canada. Tell our farmers how that is free trade. It is not. Fix those trade agreements before you come to us talking about more fast-track trade agreements.

I just want to say this to the majority leader and others. If you think this place is going to move quickly, trying to bring fast track to the floor of the Senate is a sure fire way of slowing down the proceedings of the Senate. I guarantee it. Fast track will not solve the farm crisis. It is the farm crisis that has to be our priority in the remaining few weeks of this session.

I hope very much that we can agree on a bipartisan basis on the need and the urgency to address the farm crisis.

I hope that we can do that on a bipartisan basis. Farmers don't get up in the morning or go to bed at night as Republicans or Democrats. They don't care with respect to their long-term economic survival whether it is a Republican or a Democratic plan. They care about whether it is a plan that works. They need a plan that says to them that we care about them and their future.

I hope that all of us who come from farm country and who represent rural America can join together and decide to do something meaningful, something real, and something that really does help family farmers before we adjourn this 105th Congress.

I wanted to make those comments because in the next week or so I expect there will be amendments offered once again on the floor of the Senate dealing with farm price supports that need to be passed. I will also be involved in the Appropriations Committee in conference with the House to move forward with the \$500 million indemnification program which Senator CONRAD and I and others authored and that we have already passed through the Senate. And we may be working on other issues as well, including the trade issue that I just described.

Mr. President, let me thank the Senator from Washington for allowing me to make some interim comments. I noticed I wasn't interrupted. I guess that means no one showed up to offer an amendment on his Interior bill.

Let me also say that I am a member of the Appropriations Committee and a member of the subcommittee. I very much respect his leadership. I think he does an excellent job with this piece of legislation. I say that because tomorrow I intend to offer an amendment that I hope he will perhaps accept. But I thank him again for allowing me the time to interrupt the legislation on the floor.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I make a point of order that a quorum is not present.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll to determine the presence of a quorum.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1999

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 3543 THROUGH 3553, EN BLOC

Mr. GORTON. Mr. President, I send a group of amendments to the desk and ask that they be considered en bloc.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: